

# Research on University Continuing Education: Barriers and Future Possibilities

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines barriers to research on university continuing education (UCE) in terms of two groups of factors: those that inhibit adult education research generally, and those that are specific to the UCE context and adversely affect research activity in this setting. Within UCE, the mandate, culture, qualifications of staff, the nature of work, and the nature of research that is conducted make traditional approaches to research problematic. The paper suggests that acceptance of a broader conceptualization of research by university continuing educators could enhance research related to practice.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les obstacles à la recherche sur l'éducation permanente universitaire (EPU) quant à deux groupes de facteurs: d'abord, les facteurs empêchant généralement la recherche en éducation aux adultes et ensuite, ceux étant spécifiques au contexte EPU et étant nuisibles à la recherche dans cette situation. À l'intérieur de l'EPU, le mandat, la culture, les qualifications du personnel, la nature du travail et la nature de la recherche effectuée rendent problématiques les approches traditionnelles à la recherche. Dans cet article on suggère que l'agrément d'une conceptualisation plus étendue de la recherche effectuée par des éducateurs en éducation permanente universitaire pourrait valoriser la recherche se rapportant à la pratique.

## INTRODUCTION

The four western university partners to the Prairie Symposium for Research on University Continuing Education, held in Winnipeg, June 3–4, 1999, commissioned this paper to generate discussion on barriers and deterrents to research on university continuing education (UCE) and on alternatives for improving research capacity and quality. To this end, the literature on barriers to research on adult and continuing education was briefly reviewed, with particular focus on the context of UCE and the circumstances of practitioners. The findings of a focus group interview conducted with university continuing educators at the University of Manitoba were also considered; participants were asked about their personal experiences doing research as members of a UCE unit. The literature review and the interview results suggest not only the necessary conditions for research development, but also weaknesses in the current state of affairs and several directions for stimulating research on UCE.

The paper is divided into three sections: in the first section, consideration is given to requisite elements for building research capacity; in the second, barriers and deterrents to research on UCE are viewed from the perspective of the field of adult and continuing education and in the context of UCE practice; and in the third, future possibilities and strategies for stimulating research development on UCE are discussed.

## BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY

Adult and continuing educators have not focused specifically on identifying conditions for building research capacity. Nonetheless, the literature on barriers to adult education research suggests that many writers would concur with works in related fields (e.g., see Levin, 1999) that identify the following elements as key to research development:

- a shared research agenda (based on consensus about the purposes and defining characteristics of adult education as a field of study and practice);
- skilled and experienced researchers (using processes and methods appropriate to the aims of the field);
- adequate funding, particularly to support long-term projects;
- an infrastructure that supports research (including a research

culture and resources such as time and graduate student assistance);

- high-quality national databases to reduce data collection effort and expense;
- good networks among researchers (across regions, disciplines, etc.) and opportunities for collaborative inquiry;
- established relationships among researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers to understand and influence the agendas of policy-makers and share current research knowledge;
- vehicles to promote synthesis and application of current knowledge and creation of new knowledge.

The literature review implies a general agreement within the field on the deficiencies and weaknesses that exist in current arrangements, as well as on certain strategic directions for change. Less evident from this review is the extent to which consensus exists, or might be achieved, on how to implement change.

## BARRIERS AND DETERRENTS

Numerous factors appear to impede research on (and in) UCE. For the purposes of this discussion, two categories of factors are considered: those affecting the field (i.e., adult education as a field of study/practice) and those more specific to the context of practice (i.e., university continuing education). The factors identified as broadly affecting the field have implications for anyone interested in conducting research in UCE; the contextual issues directly affect continuing education staff. Not surprisingly, the factors identified in the adult education (AE) literature as a hindrance to research point to weaknesses in elements previously identified as instrumental to research development. These parallels are drawn not to suggest that research development depends upon achieving some “ideal state” in terms of key elements, but rather to encourage discussion on a wide range of factors that affect the quantity and quality of UCE research activity. This approach also provides a rough framework for reflecting on strategic options for strengthening research on UCE.

## THE FIELD

If a shared research agenda is central to research development, adult education as a field of study is, to borrow Welton's (1992) description, "in a mess" (p. 79). This field has a long history of practice and a relatively short history of scholarship, but the theorizing of the last 40 years has not only rendered less than promised, it has also been highly divisive. With little consensus emerging on the purposes and defining characteristics of adult education, this "amorphous and boundary-less" (Merriam, 1991, p. 42) terrain is, paradoxically, increasingly fragmented by discordant views on the theory, politics, and practice of adult education.

Lack of focus is evident in the research on adult education. Studies tend to be applied, small scale, short in duration, isolated, unsystematic, and noncumulative (Duke, 1991; Lawler & Ferro, 1995; Sork, 1993). In terms of disciplinary approach, they are generally eclectic and either reflective of the concerns of practice (the majority) or those of scholarship, but seldom both (Thompson & Wagner, 1994). The consequence is a field of study with no coherence: adult education's body of knowledge is fragmented, poorly integrated, and inadequate, its nomenclature "undisciplined" (Long, 1991, p. 88), its purposes confused, and the relationships among its constituents (i.e., researchers, practitioners, and practitioner-researchers) distant. Garrison (1994) identifies several dominant themes in the AE literature, including "andragogy, self-directed learning, critical thinking / reflection, participation / dropout, program planning, and adult development." He maintains that these "interdisciplinary knowledge domains" have the potential to provide adult education with a distinctive theoretical framework; however, without "concerted and extensive research efforts" (p. 9), these domains will remain inchoate and disparate.

Although there may be some agreement on research priorities and on the knowledge and skills required of researchers, the low volume of adult education research, carried out by a relatively small number of researchers, and its relatively low priority (Brooke & Morris, 1987; Pearce, 1993)—even among those required to engage in research (Garrison & Baskett, 1989)—suggest that adult education lacks sufficient numbers of skilled and experienced researchers to build strong research capacity (Blunt, 1994).

Graduate programs are the traditional training grounds for researchers. Yet adult education graduate programs have tended to emphasize the development of practitioners, albeit with questionable results (Rubenson,

1994; Thompson & Wagner, 1994), “while downgrading the importance of research training” (Griffith, 1994, p. 140). Sork (1993) contends that this failure to appreciate “the research traditions and contributions to scholarship that are rewarded in universities)” (p. 81) confuses the field of study with that of practice. More than any other factor, Sork argues, this orientation has contributed to the long-standing perception that adult education programs, and their graduates, are academically marginal. The interdisciplinary backgrounds of staff in these programs also affects the training of graduate students. As Sork (1993) observes in a review of adult education programs in western Canada, “low faculty commitment to and involvement with the field of study can result in teaching and research only marginally relevant to extant concerns and issues”(p. 84). Thus, it is not unexpected that many graduate students, even those interested in pursuing academic careers, fail to develop strong research skills or interests. At the same time, Garrison (1994) notes that much quality research done by graduate students is never published and is lost to the field’s knowledge base, in part because faculty are not committed to research and publishing.

Inadequate funding does not warrant much attention in the AE literature as a barrier to research. Given the state of research development in adult education and the paucity of long-term, large-scale research projects, this finding is not surprising. Still, it is worth noting that in Britain and Europe, where major policy initiatives have led to the infusion of substantial research monies, sizable growth in adult education research has occurred (Field & Taylor, 1995). Here at home, even small-scale funding sources may not be fully utilized; in the 1998–99 academic year, for example, the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE) Research Fund received only two applications. This situation may reflect different factors, such as the high ratio of effort required to the size of the grant (Lawler & Ferro, 1995) or, in the university context, the relatively low priority assigned to research by UCE practitioners and administrators (Brooke & Morris, 1987; Garrison & Baskett, 1989; Pearce, 1993).

The insular nature of adult education as a field of study results in low visibility of AE research (Sork, 1993) and is one factor that inhibits the development of interdisciplinary research networks and the exchange of current research knowledge. But even within the field, research networks and opportunities for collaborative inquiry are limited and fragmented along the field’s theory / practice divide. There is, for instance, little overlap in the membership or conference attendance of professional organizations like CAUCE and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult

Education (CASAE) and, one suspects, little crossover interest in their publications. A similar situation exists in the United States, but there are several journals available in that country to those writing in the field.

With respect to other vehicles for disseminating adult education's body of knowledge, Welton (1992) notes that in Canada, as in the United States, there are relatively few publishing houses willing to publish AE texts. As a consequence, much graduate student research is not accessible (Mason & Lifvendahl, 1994), and a large proportion of the field's literature exists as "fugitive material" (Imel, 1989, p. 135)—unpublished or limited publications including conference proceedings, government-funded project reports, and internal evaluations and reports.

National databases, another key element in building research capacity, are also an issue for those interested in research on areas of adult education practice, including UCE. Little national Canadian data exists, and much of what does exist is either dated (e.g., see Devereaux, 1984) or otherwise inadequate for research purposes. The annual Statistics Canada Survey of Enrollment in University Non-Degree Continuing Education Programs is plagued by difficult methodological and conceptual problems, and based on low data-utilization rates, data collection for this survey has been suspended in the current year.

In summary, although disheartening, this overview of barriers to research in the field of adult and continuing education does more than identify systemic problems; it also suggests priority issues and possible avenues for change. One widely supported strategy in the literature involves redesigning graduate programs to enhance the acquisition of research skills and to foster the development of a climate that values and supports research. Other strategies, perhaps more easily accomplished, include the development of research networks and cooperative research conferences, such as the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) 2000 (June, 2000), which will involve five other research organizations.

## CONTEXT OF UCE PRACTICE

The context of practice refers to conditions inside and external to UCE units that affect activities. For this paper, the focus is on the effect of context on research activities in UCE. Conditions can restrict, support, or modify the ability or desire of UCE staff to conduct research. The relationship of context to research activity is complex because of the interaction of multiple

conditions on researchers. Nonetheless, by understanding the conditions that affect participation in research, strategies can be developed that may reduce negative conditions and strengthen supportive ones.

In the literature review undertaken for this paper, a number of conditions were identified as affecting participation in research in UCE units, including mandate, culture, nature of work/jobs, qualification of staff, and nature of research.

## MANDATE OF UCE UNITS

Research is hampered by the UCE mandate in several ways. First, the primary mandate of UCE units is to provide community-based programs and service, rather than to conduct research. In Canada, relatively few UCE units have an academic mandate, a condition that generally negates research activities. Second, the mandate best fits a highly formalized organizational structure with centralized decision-making, while scholarly innovation in UCE works best in an informal organization with decentralized decision-making (Thompson & Wagner, 1994). Third, the mandate requires staff to be generalists rather than specialists. Research activity typically occurs when staff have specialized knowledge, which they translate into focused research interests and defined research agendas. Finally, staff roles are often not well defined in terms of distinguishing between academic/professional roles and administrative roles. Given that core UCE activities are program delivery and service, all staff, regardless of type of position, will engage in work related to these activities. At the University of Manitoba, for example, program directors (academic staff) appear to perform very similar programming/administrative duties to program administrators (support staff). This situation was explained by a participant in the focus group interview:

Program directors carry a lot of administrative responsibility, so instead of the academics taking the time to keep up-to-date on the field and practice or investing in doing research to inform their work, we have moved in the other direction and created role confusion . . . I am overwhelmed just as everybody else is with administrative responsibilities . . . but we have created a bad situation by not standing up and making legitimate what we should be doing [that is, research].(Focus Group #5)

## CULTURE OF UCE

The market-driven, entrepreneurial, competitive, and profit-oriented culture in UCE negatively impacts research activity (Duke, 1996; Field & Taylor, 1995). This prevailing culture sends a message that research is not important and leads to little institutional support for research activity. Indeed, Baskett (1996) suggests it is hostile to research, which is seen as non-productive work because it does not contribute to the production expectations of programming and service. He also asserts that “programming and research are the antithesis of each other; hardly an encouraging environment for scholarship” (p. 78). Elliot (1996) believes that “research is not a core activity [or]. . . a valued activity. . . A consequence is that staff who are engaged in research are generally not supported . . . and are often regarded with suspicion by colleagues, and given little or no time allowance to carry it out” (p. 107). This point of view was also expressed in the focus group:

I always thought there is a real sense of frustration amongst us because it would be so easy for us to identify places where we could do some really excellent research in the Division’s work, but there is no opportunity and no support . . . [I wonder] how would you even start because we are so distant from where research is done as part of the normal course of events. (Focus Group #5)

This prevailing culture negatively impacts research in two other ways. The emphasis on problem-solving and finding quick answers drains time and energy from longer-term consideration and analysis of data (Elliot, 1996). In addition, the competitive nature of UCE discourages collaboration in research activities between individual researchers, between institutions, and between UCE units and other academic units that are considered important to the development of a research culture (Elliot, 1996; Field & Taylor, 1995).

## NATURE OF UCE WORK / JOBS

The nature of work in UCE is built around its core activities, that is, program delivery and community service within a culture that promotes cost recovery and competition. As a result, staff devote almost all their working time to these activities in an effort to achieve enrollment and positive financial outcomes. They feel there is little time or flexibility to do

research because the programming-related work is fixed and full-time. One focus group participant commented that “the idea of having both a program load, which is seen as a full load typically a 35 to 40 hour week, and doing research is unrealistic [when compared to] traditional academic positions where a full [teaching] load is something less [than a 40 hour week], which by definition allows time for research” (Focus Group #1). Another focus group participant viewed time flexibility in this way:

It is the block of time that they have [in other academic units] that we don't have because we run thirteen months a year on our programs and in order to get good research done and good writing done you have to have a block of time in which you can immerse yourself rather than one day a week or two evenings a week—[this] doesn't do it because so much of your time is spent in start up time figuring out where you were when you left off a week ago; you lose the momentum when you are not immersed in it. (Focus Group #4)

For most staff working in UCE in Canada, research is not part of their assigned duties. The bulk of staff time (approximately 70 percent) is spent on programming (Hartman, 1982). Morris and Potter (1996) reported that only about 20 percent of UCE staff identified research as a component of their job. Even for those staff who have research responsibilities, research is accorded considerably less weight than programming. Garrison & Baskett (1989) found that only 10 percent of university-affiliated UCE/AE staff perceived research as their primary job, and of those who expected to publish, over one-third saw their primary responsibility as administrative-management or program development. Further, they reported that 39 percent of UCE/AE academic staff who expected to publish felt that their institutions sent a mixed message, that is, staff were expected to engage in research, but no support was available in terms of time and resources. Similarly, Duke (1996) observed that although research is expected of UCE staff, it is not funded, other than as part of salary. Even when academic staff contemplate engaging in research, few actually do. Bains (1985) found that while academic staff showed a preference for more assigned research time (13 percent of their job assignment), only about 6 percent of their time was reported as actually being devoted to research.

In cases where research is expected, programming workloads may limit research productivity. Pearce (1993), in a survey of UCE deans, reported that deans indicated staff should do research on their own time. Elliot (1996) claimed that because staff workloads are high, with ever-increasing expectations to do more programming, tired staff viewed research as a

daunting task. One focus group participant agreed:

Research is something that is done after you have done the real job, it's not valued the same way as the real job is valued so you do it on your own time after all your other work is completed, and the primary problem with that is that we are all doing jobs that take one and a half times a work week to get the job done, which leaves very little time and energy for research. (Focus Group #4)

## QUALIFICATION OF UCE STAFF

Two perspectives are clearly evident in the literature concerning the effect of UCE staff qualifications on research activity. First, it is common for staff to be hired with only the necessary qualifications required to do programming. Percival (1993) indicates that since staff learn much of what they need to know on the job, advanced degrees in CE/AE are not viewed as necessary to do programming. Baskett (1996) agrees with this reality, pointing to others, including Schon, Dechant, Marsick, and Zemke, who contended that most of the knowledge needed to do a job is acquired on the job. Given the core activities of UCE, staff are hired to do programming and then learn a good deal about how to do it on the job, the result of which is staff who are neither qualified nor inclined to do research (Baskett, 1996; Elliot, 1996).

The second perspective is that the eclectic academic backgrounds of UCE staff can have a negative impact on research activity about UCE. Field & Taylor (1995) point out that UCE staff traditionally "represent a variety of disciplines; in the past, the chief research identity of an individual in an adult continuing education unit might have lain in archaeology, geography or literature, but rarely in a continuing education subject" ( p. 254). Sork (1993) contends that the disadvantage of staff with multi-disciplinary backgrounds is that "faculty allegiances are often to their primary disciplines rather than to AE as a field of study" (p. 84). Thus, perspectives suggest that current UCE staff qualifications do not facilitate research activity in UCE, particularly research activity about UCE.

## NATURE OF RESEARCH IN UCE

The very nature of UCE research inhibits research activity as it tends to be small scale, often unreported, poorly supported, not valued in the academy,

and limited in its application to practice. Relatively few large-scale, sustained research projects into major areas of study of UCE exist; rather, much of the research consists of small-scale, scattered, and eclectic projects, most often done by individuals pursuing advanced degrees (Elliot, 1996). According to Field & Taylor (1995), those in graduate programs who work in UCE publish one or two articles (based on their graduate work), then “abandon” research, a phenomenon that “fosters a single-shot approach to publishing and a discontinuous and jerky pursuit of research themes rather than a sustained and consistent inquiry” (p. 257). Because UCE research often is not reported, UCE staff know little about research outcomes (Elliot, 1996; Field & Taylor, 1995). Further, because research is typically focused on practitioner concerns, it encourages insularity in the research community (i.e., research results are shared in a very limited way).

In general, there is little structure to support research. There are few, if any, graduate programs offered by UCE units; thus, there is limited opportunity for staff to work with graduate students. Similarly, mentor relationships rarely exist in UCE, and because of the “private” nature of research and the competitive culture, research networks and collaborative research opportunities are scarce.

UCE research is neither valued within the academy nor is it apparently used to inform and improve practice, and both conditions tend to have a negative impact on research activity. Baskett (1996) states that “research in UCE is neither valued by UCE leaders nor by university senior administrators, nor do contemporary forces give any hint that this will change” (p. 75). As for the suggestion that increasing the focus on UCE research is a means to gain greater respectability within the academy, Duke (1996) provides the perspective that within the “pecking order” of a university, “if Education struggles for recognition . . . CE is the unwanted, non-school-oriented, impossibly diffuse, tail of Education. In such a context, any public recognition and financial support for research in CE is not likely to have high significance, symbolically nor substantially (p. 209). Baskett (1996) points out that the practice of continuing to hire UCE staff without graduate degrees in CE/AE perpetuates the problem, and it is at best “wishful thinking” that UCE research will gain respectability within universities. Even in AE research circles, the research efforts of UCE staff appear to have no value. This sentiment was expressed by a participant in the focus group interview with reference to a Canadian adult education research organization:

That is an organization that I feel I should be linked with because they are the research side of AE/UCE, but if you have been to the conferences they make you feel as if you don't belong; they are a bunch of snobs, [implying] that we are the researchers and who are you guys?(Focus Group #3)

With respect to UCE practice, Blaney (1996) claims that there is no evidence research improves practice. In a review of the performance of 30 UCE program directors, he found no relationship between programming performance and research activity. As well, UCE staff appear to have little knowledge about what research is being done, how that research relates to practice, and what problems and issues are of interest to others in UCE. Thompson (1996) supports this view, in part, by claiming that “contributing to reduced research activity is the separation of scholarship and practice” (p. 65). This was also captured in a comment in the focus group interview: “We somehow separate our practice from our research so we are not generating research off the practice itself” (Focus Group #3). The result is that practitioners (UCE staff) see no relationship between research and their practice, and pay little attention to research because they feel it does not apply to them. Further, it is suggested that UCE staff do not attend to UCE/AE research because much, if not all, of it is written for other researchers in academic publications. Without exposure to research, how can UCE staff begin to act and think in research terms, and raise researchable questions? Baskett (1996) suggests that the *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education* should “stop emulating other learned journals . . . [and become] a Canadian professional magazine to update practitioners on relevant research and to share practice wisdom and experience” (p. 81).

Overall, the five conditions—mandate, culture, nature of work, staff qualifications, and nature of research—have a negative impact on UCE research activity. Reducing these negative impacts would require changing some of the fundamental structures, attitudes, and practices of UCE, a task that is not easily accomplished. As well, such fundamental changes may threaten the existence of UCE. Duke (1996) warns that moving too far in emphasizing research may place the very existence of UCE in peril by abandoning the core activities of program delivery and community service. Given the practical focus of UCE, it may be more realistic and prudent to begin to build research interest that informs and improves practice.

## FUTURE POSSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES

This paper intentionally focuses on barriers to research but, in doing so, does not discount strengths that may be attributed to research conducted in the field. A positive theme, for example, is seen in the quantity and quality of graduate student research (Blunt & Lee, 1994). Other writers find strengths mirrored in what their colleagues view as weaknesses. Although the field's characteristically diverse range of research interests and methodological approaches has been seen as fragmenting research efforts (Garrison & Baskett, 1989), Alan Thomas (1995) suggests that what may be emerging is, in fact, a new research paradigm based on "learning" rather than on "education."

It may be that the understanding of learning, which involves engaging in what we are at the same time studying, does not lend itself to the cumulative patterns so treasured in other venues and traditions of research. (pp. 110–111)

However, it must be noted that the efficacy of adult education research warrants little attention in the literature. This is particularly true, as the previous section on the UCE context makes evident, when it comes to research on UCE.

What, then, does the future hold for UCE research? Several possibilities are suggested in the literature. The most likely scenario is that the current situation remains unchanged, and the field continues, as Thomas (1995) describes it, in a "slow, a too slow, ascent to conventional power and respectability" (p. 110)—an ascent that is even more difficult, and unlikely, for adult educators in UCE than for those in traditional academic departments. A remote possibility, certainly in the short term, is that transformations within the field of adult education will impact positively on the training and research orientations of future generations of university continuing educators, assuming that staffing models within UCE come to recognize the value of such training.

As we emerge from the transition we are experiencing, we will hopefully put aside our methodological differences, develop an interdisciplinary focus, and become an integral presence in the larger educational community through major research and scholarly graduate programs. (Garrison, 1994, p. 215)

The world Garrison envisions, where new generations of adult educators are trained and socialized as researchers, would remove some of the

impediments to research on and in UCE, but it has two obvious disadvantages. First, there is little evidence that this is a likely scenario for the field of adult education in North America. Second, without critical changes in UCE, skilled and committed researchers who find themselves in this environment would still be immersed in a climate largely unsupportive of research activity.

Adopting a broader conceptualization of research and scholarship, one that includes the notion of the reflective practitioner as a researcher of his or her own practice, is another option (Blaney, 1996; Thompson, 1996). Given the popularity of the concept in practice-oriented literature, it is an idea that appears to resonate with practitioners across the field. Practitioner-researchers, a term particularly appropriate to practitioners in academic settings, are most concerned with solving problems of practice, but, as importantly, they generally lack the skills, inclination, and supports required to do basic research.

At the same time, as Thompson (1996) citing Fletcher notes, UCE staff hold fairly traditional assumptions about what constitutes research and the research process, and these assumptions limit research possibilities in UCE. Despite what appears to be support for a broadly defined, practice-related definition of research (Baskett, 1996; Blaney, 1996; Thompson, 1996), many continuing educators continue to assume that research requires a formal proposal and strict adherence to the scientific method, and that the problems of practice they choose to study are likely of little interest to others. As long as continuing educators hold these traditional views, Baskett (1996) argues that there will be little research activity in UCE because, as he notes, "there are relatively few continuing education practitioners who are equipped, or have the inclination, to undertake the kind of research that is regarded as acceptable by academic standards" (p. 80).

Fundamental to the UCE context, then, are questions as to what should constitute "research" in this setting. What kinds of inquiry would best integrate with and support practice? What kind of training do university continuing educators require to engage in such inquiry? How should such inquiry be evaluated? How can a research culture be established to encourage practice-oriented inquiry? Achieving consensus on the issue of what should constitute research or scholarship in UCE would seem to be the first of many problems needing resolution.

The practitioner-researcher and the concept of reflective practice "have arrived," but, as the questions posed earlier suggest, it is not yet clear what

these terms mean in the context of UCE practice. Answers to these questions necessitate reconceptualizing both research and theory in terms of the role of the practitioner-researcher, a task that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In general terms, however, practitioner-researchers, as the name implies, manage two roles that are integrated through reflective practice, a process that involves seeing one's actions in practice as experiments from which to learn (Jarvis, 1999). Reflective practice connects the "real job" of the practitioner to what Robson (1993) describes as "real world research." Real world research involves problem-solving, using actionable variables, predicting effects and getting large effects, and developing and testing programs, services, and interventions. Typically, it involves strict cost and time constraints, generalist researchers, little consistency in focus from study to study, multiple methods, and a client orientation.

Common sense suggests that the kind of research associated with the practitioner-researcher should be typical within UCE. Yet, as university continuing educators, we know that research of this type is neither as commonplace nor as well executed as it could be. Surely our first concern in UCE must be to strengthen our understanding of and our capacity for research aimed at improving practice.

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